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Historical Criminology and the Explanatory Power of the Past

Abstract

To what extent can the past 'explain' the present? This deceptively simple question lies at the heart of historical criminology (research which incorporates historical primary sources while addressing present-day debates and practices in the criminal justice field). This article seeks first to categorise the ways in which criminologists have used historical data thus far, arguing that it is most commonly deployed to 'problematize' the contemporary rather than to 'explain' it. The article then interrogates the reticence of criminologists to attribute explicative power in relation to the present to historical data. Finally, it proposes the adoption of long time-frame historical research methods, outlining three advantages which would accrue from this: the identification and analysis of historical continuities; a more nuanced, shared understanding of micro/macro change over time in relation to criminal justice; and a method for identifying and analysing instances of historical recurrence, particularly in perceptions and discourses around crime and justice.

Keywords

Historical criminology; historiography; the past; history; policing

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It does not seem to me that we understand the laws governing the return of the past. I feel more and more as if time did not exist at all, only various spaces between which the living can move back and forth as they like. (Sebald, 2001: 261)

Introduction

Building on prior investigations into the ‘utility’ of historical data within criminological studies (Bosworth, 2001; Lawrence, 2012; Garland, 2014) this article seeks further to consider a deceptively simple question: to what extent can data from and about the past – ‘history’ – explain and serve as a guide to action in the present? In doing so it draws on Corfield’s (2007) representation of linear historical time as a trialectical ‘braid’ (composed of continuity, gradual and radical change), on Koselleck’s notion of the ‘contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous’ (2004: 90) and on much older assertions of the logical comprehensibility of the past from the standpoint of the present (Buckle, 1857; Ayers, 1951). It argues throughout that long time-frame historical criminology (the analysis of historical evidence over periods of at least several centuries) is the only methodologically robust means by which to evaluate the potential for the past to help explain the present.

Section I below analyses some current uses of the past within historical criminology (and, to a lesser extent, criminology more broadly), seeking primarily to identify and interrogate the underpinning assumptions of the utility of historical data revealed therein. Then, building on this and taking the policing of London from c.1750 as an exemplar case study, Section II considers three ways in which long time-frame historical criminology can help to bolster confidence among criminologists to deploy historical data to explain the present: by identifying continuities or historical persistence; by allowing periods of both gradual and more radical change to be delineated (without falling into the methodological trap of periodisation or stadial models of historical change)¹; and by facilitating the analysis of recurrent historical motifs or memes (locating periods of resurgence during which specific historical social, economic and cultural conditions display a high degree of congruence with those of a later era or of the present).

¹ On the problems inherent in stadial models, see XXXX, this issue).

Overall, the article seeks to promote a new assertiveness concerning the role of history as a valid and valuable part of any criminological explanation of the present, seeing it not as ‘an esoteric luxury’ (Pratt, 1997: 62) but rather as ‘a vast reservoir of experience and information’ (Corfield, 2010: 2). As such, the article may be seen as contributing to recent efforts to counter ‘the spectre of the short term’ (Guldi and Armitage, 2014: 1).

I

Towards the end of the twentieth century, with certain notable exceptions (for example, Garland, 1985), it was rare for sociologically-trained criminologists to reference or incorporate historical data in their research to any significant degree. To paraphrase Lawrence (2012: 314) the past was ‘not something most criminologists thought about very often’. This aversion was highlighted by a number of authors at the time, who called for a greater dialogue between the disciplines of history and criminology. Pratt, for example, called criminology ‘a subject without a past’ (1997: 60) and Davies and Pearson (1999: 6) argued for greater ‘dialogue and interchange between criminologists and historians’. Such calls have been answered since the turn of the century both by criminological research seeking to incorporate historical methods and approaches (see, for example, Neocleous, 2000; Rigakos & Hadden, 2001; Zedner 2006; Loader, 2006; Godfrey, Cox & Farrall, 2010; Knepper and Scicluna, 2010; Lawrence, 2017) and by works reflecting at a methodological or conceptual level on the challenges involved in this (Rock, 2005; see Lawrence, 2012 and Churchill, Crawford & Barker, 2017 for surveys). However, such ‘progress’ has only gone so far. Historical criminology (taken here to mean research which incorporates historical primary sources while addressing present-day debates and practices in the criminal justice field) still retains a pronounced tendency to use historical data only in very specific, and rather limited, ways. Generally, there is a tendency in the field to shy away from using the past to ‘explain’ the present, in favour of using it simply to offer new ways of thinking about contemporary data.

To elaborate briefly, it is possible to delineate three primary ways in which historical criminologists have tended to reference the past, each of which rarely treats historical research as explicative of the present in its own right but rather considers it mainly as a

useful foil or adjunct to more compelling contemporary data. We might characterise these three prevalent modes of historical criminology as 'the jarring counterpoint', 'the surprising continuity' and the 'long term historical survey'.

The 'jarring counterpoint' might be taken to indicate historical criminology which intends to disrupt smooth and complacent narratives of progress, and/or to problematize contemporary notions of the fixity of certain elements of the criminal justice system. A good example of this might be Bosworth (2001), which uses an exemplary investigation of women's imprisonment in an historical context (18th-century Paris) to 'consider how historical research into the prison contributes to an understanding of imprisonment today' (431). Bosworth fulfils this aim by using her historical research primarily to 'challenge epistemological traditions in the study of crime and punishment', using a detailed historical case study to highlight flaws in the methods, approaches and chronology of contemporary criminology. She does not use her historical data (which is confined to a discrete 'slice' of the past) directly to 'explain' contemporary imprisonment (either in France or elsewhere) but that notes how 'posing [...] questions about the past may affect our understanding of imprisonment in the present by reminding us that the prison does not exist in a vacuum' (440). Thus, a slice of the past provides a 'jarring counterpoint' to the present, and a spur to action in the future, but is not used directly 'explain' it.

A second mode of historical criminology might be termed the 'surprising continuity'. Here historical data (again, usually from a discrete 'slice' of the past) is used to debunk the presumed novelty of processes and/or developments in the present. A good example of this form of historical criminology might be the debate over public/private policing and the state monopolisation thesis. In an excellent article, Zedner (2006) intervened decisively into the debate over the presumed fragmentation of a putative state monopoly on policing. She drew a series of parallels (the phrase 'historical parallel' is used frequently) to show that developments which appear new – the marketization of policing, economic analyses of crime, a focus on prevention – were also present in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century. The article thus did useful service in convincingly showing that certain late-twentieth century developments are not novel. However, as Zedner points out, she did this via 'the ruse of historical juxtaposition' (83), rather than by seeking to trace the contours of

developments between the later eighteenth and the later twentieth centuries. Hence, her historical data remained primarily used to frame how we might think about contemporary data – it did not *explain*, in any direct way, the present.

A third type or mode of historical criminology might be termed the ‘long term historical survey’. As an exemplar here we might consider Godfrey, Cox & Farrall (2010). This provides an excellent analysis of the state’s attempts to control serious, habitual/repeat offenders from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (and also considers the various social and economic factors which could lead to or ameliorate habitual offending). It incorporates both an in-depth awareness of historical sources and processes and a desire to comment on contemporary problems and policies. However, while it does provide a long-term survey of a criminological issue, here too there is a conceptual or methodological disconnect between the historical and the contemporary. The book’s historical analysis ends at the close of the 1940s and thus the final chapters, which comment on the view of Feeley and Simon (1992) that the 1970s witnessed the rise of a ‘new penology’ (characterised by increased use of imprisonment, a merging of surveillance and custody and an emergence of actuarial thinking in relation to repeat offenders) again resort to drawing ‘parallels’ and pointing out ‘similarities’ between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Essentially, the past stays in the past again. The authors do not analyse the period between the 1950s and the new penology. They do seek to draw ‘lessons’ for the present but they do this primarily by way of a compare and contrast historical methodology. There are some works of historical criminology which provide long-time frame analysis which extends right up to the present (see, for example, Eisner, 2003; Yeomans, 2014) but these are very much outliers and many more works fit within the characterisation above, generally considering a period of historical time and drawing parallels with the present rather than directly explaining it.

A brief consideration of the notion of ‘historical explanation’ is perhaps apposite at this point. All three modes of current historical criminology offer something, in their different ways, to our understanding of contemporary criminal justice. They enable us to think more clearly about contemporary data, to identify which trends and processes might be new (and hence worthy of particular scrutiny) and which have longer pedigrees. They problematize

easy/smooth narratives and show the complexity of change over time.² In some senses, therefore, the three modes of criminology outlined above might all be considered *explicative* of the present, in that they all use historical data to enhance our understanding of contemporary phenomena. However, at present, it is rare for historical criminology to use historical data directly to *explain* the present. As argued, it primarily uses historical data to problematize or highlight the complexity of the present (and contemporary data), which is then dealt with *on its own terms*. In the examples above, there is no strong sense that historical data might be used in the same frame of reference as contemporary data in some instances, or might provide explanations based on *causality* (in the sense of ‘event/process a’ in the past led – directly or indirectly – to ‘event/process b’ in the present).

Of course, there is a long debate within the philosophy of history as to how historical explanation can and should be conceptualised as a knowledge system (see, for example, White, 1973; Mink, 1987; Roth, 2008). A presumed dichotomy between an historical approach to explanation, concerned with the ‘culturally and temporally unique status of events’, and a scientific approach which ‘seeks to situate particular items or occurrences as outcomes of general processes’ has led often to a tendency to contrast the narrative explanations provided by history with the nomological ones constructed by more scientific disciplines. This in turn has led to a presumed distinction between ‘explaining (by means of causes) versus understanding (by the citing of reasons)’. (Roth: 215) A side effect of this presumed distinction has been a disregard of the possibility of objective explanation using historical data. This article, while acknowledging the difficulties inherent in this, nonetheless agrees with Roth that ‘histories need not and do not add up to a single, cohesive explanatory pattern’ in order to add value to understanding in the present (221) and seeks to identify and discuss different types of valid historical explanation, some emphatically causal, some less so.

The starting point for this endeavour must be an interrogation of the reticence of both historians and sociologically-trained criminologists to rely on the past as an explanatory tool in relation to the present. Some of the more readily apparent reasons for this have been

² For further consideration of the ways in which historical criminology has ‘used’ historical data to date, see XXXX, this issue.

rehearsed elsewhere (see, for example, Knepper & Scicluna, 2010; Lawrence, 2012; Garland, 2014). They include but are not limited to: something of a preoccupation among criminologists with the presumed novelty of late modernity (Rock, 2005) and a focus on influencing policy (Loader & Sparks, 2010); a sense among many historians (partly as a legacy of the 'cultural turn') that it is overly presumptuous to pronounce on the present, let alone think about influencing policy; the fact that both the police and policy makers have very little interest in historical explanations of contemporary phenomena (despite the interesting work being done by the History & Policy network); a prevalent perception that history both as a discipline and as a process is fundamentally about change over time and the development of difference rather than continuity; the ways in which the periodization often employed by historians to map change over time artificially creates perceived layers of conceptual distance between contemporary and historical events and processes.

In essence, though, it might be argued that all of these 'reasons' are just surface manifestations of specific assumptions about the past, underpinned by a particular view of the relationship between the past and the present. There is a widely-held 'common sense' assumption (neatly encapsulated by Hartley's influential characterisation of the past as a foreign country where 'they do things differently' - 1953: 1), which holds that the further back one voyages into the past the more unfamiliar the landscape. Taking policing in London as an example then, a 'common-sense' assumption might be that 'the further back in time one peers, the more different both policing and its contexts were, and so the less utility historical sources have in relation to the present'. Such a conception of the past is beguiling and widely-held publicly and, arguably, among both historians and criminologists.

It may at this point, and in what follows, be helpful to visualise aspects of the argument being presented. Thus, this 'common sense' view of the utility of the past in explaining the present – the notion that, the further back one gazes into the past, the more unfamiliar the terrain - might be represented visually as in Figure 1 below. Time is represented on the X axis and 'explanatory power' on the Y axis. The term 'explanatory power' is taken here to mean 'how helpful is data from this time period in explaining (for example) policing as we observe it now in London?' For the sake of argument, it is posited that 'explanatory power' might be notionally subdivided into four bands or divisions with differing levels of utility in

relation to an explanation of the present. Using policing in London as an example then, we might posit these four bands of explanatory power thus:

Band 1 (75-100%): Police organisation, powers and context in London are very similar to contemporary practices and environments, hence historical data can be used fairly interchangeably with contemporary data.

Band 2 (50-75%): Policing and its contexts are fairly similar to the contemporary with relatively minor differences in form and function, hence data can still be used cautiously as part of an explanation of the contemporary.

Band 3 (25-50%): Police functions and settings are recognisable but significantly different from the present, hence historical data can only really be used to problematize or facilitate current thinking.

Band 4 (0-25%): Policing and indeed London itself are very different to contemporary forms, functions and contexts, and hence historical data might be used to reflect upon current trends and methodologies, but has no direct explanatory power.

[Insert Figure 1: The 'Common-Sense' View of the Contemporary Utility of Historical Data about Policing]

Thus, the 'common sense' view as represented in the line on Figure 1 is that, the further one reaches back into the past, the less familiar policing and its context becomes and hence the less 'explanatory power' historical data about policing has in relation to understanding and explaining the present. In this model, the period back to roughly the end of the Second World War/1950s falls within Band 1, wherein policing and its context is similar enough to the present for historical data to be drawn upon to help explain the present with a reasonable degree of confidence but, the further back in time the sources are located the more their 'explanatory power' becomes attenuated until one reaches a point (around the 1780s) where historical data might be useful for sparking ideas in relation to the present but has no 'explanatory power' – IE: no purchase on the present.

This 'common sense' view of the explanatory power of historical sources in relation to the present sees this as diminishing gradually and evenly over time. In actuality, it might be contended that criminologists often have a different view of the utility of the past, predicated upon the existence of a kind of historical 'event horizon'. Rather than imagine historical data as progressively but gradually becoming less and less useful in relation to the present, the 'chronocentrism' identified by Rock (2005) means that criminologists often see a conceptual shelf around 25-30 years in the past, beyond which society suddenly becomes more alien and, by implication, much less able to provide usable/useful data which can inform explanations of contemporary problems and practices. Referring back to the four notional division of explanatory power discussed above, this prevalent criminological view of historical data might be visually represented as in Figure 2 below. Hence, a criminologist writing today, informed by the concept of 'late modernity', might be likely to conclude that historical sources dating back to the c.1980s would be highly relevant to any explanation of the present, that evidence dating back to the 1960s might still have some explanatory power but that beyond that the historical record would be of only passing or illustrative interest.

[Insert Figure 2: Prevalent Criminological Conception of the Explanatory Power of Historical Data]

Examples of this outlook might include the final instalment of Garland's sophisticated trilogy investigating contemporary crime control, which is focussed on 'the dramatic developments that have occurred in our social response to crime during the last thirty years' (2002: vii). Similarly, Bayley and Shearing's influential thesis positing the disintegration of the state's putative monopoly on policing dated the transformation to 'the past 30 years' (1996: 586). And likewise, earlier still, Robert Reiner identified the gradual loss of legitimacy of the police as occurring from around the mid-1950s (30 years prior to his publication), which he identified as the 'high point of police legitimation' (1985: 61). Other examples can readily be found but the point being made is that it has been (and remains) common among criminologists to identify a period immediately prior to the present (usually around 25-30 years) from which historical data can be used with a fair degree of confidence, in contrast to anything earlier than that when historical conditions are presumed to be very different and

where historical data is therefore no longer relevant to *explaining* the present, only to contextualising or foregrounding it.

Both of the underpinning conceptions of the utility of historical data discussed here - the 'common sense' and the 'prevalent criminological' - are beguiling, but do either they actually hold water conceptually? Section II below will argue that both of these are open to critique and contend that long time-frame historical study is the best (and indeed probably the only) method via which to assess the potential utility of particular sets or classes of historical data for explaining present day criminal justice mechanisms and problems. Clearly, contemporary and historical sources of data differ – in format, quantity and quality. However, it is contended that this alone does not explain the reticence of criminologists to engage with historical data. There are now huge collections of online historical sources pertinent to the study of crime and criminal justice, much of which provides exceptionally rich. There have been recent calls (Godfrey, 2018 forthcoming) for such sources to be more extensively used than they are at present.

II

There are three ways in which long-time frame historical criminology (the analysis of historical evidence over periods of at least several centuries) can help provide an enhanced understanding of the utility of the past in explaining the present. First, continuity or historical persistence can only really be identified in this manner. Identifying *parallels* or *similarities* between slices of historical time, while useful in stimulating discussion around the novelty or otherwise of the present, does not really *explain* the contemporary, as the persistence of particular conditions in the intervening centuries remain unknown. Second, working across an historical span of centuries facilitates an informed view of the role of change over time – both gradual/incremental and sudden/sweeping – in the creation of the present. Third, detailed study of both persistence and change over the long-term then opens up the intriguing possibility of identifying periods of resurgence, when historical conditions (social, economic or political) recur, or when public or official responses to crime

and disorder display a strong congruence with a later period or with the present. Each of these will be discussed in turn below.

The concept of historical continuity or persistence is not something which falls naturally to either historians or criminologists. Although, logically, continuity 'provides the benchmark against which other variations can be assessed', it is 'often underestimated [...] and certainly under-theorised' (Corfield 2010: 15), perhaps in part as it runs counter to the beguiling 'common sense' view of the past as outlined in Section I. A number of historical criminologists have, it is true, discerned similarities between public discourses around crime and its amelioration in the early 1800s and those of the late-twentieth/early-twenty first century (see here, Garland 1996; Neocleous 2000; Rigakos & Hadden 2001). However, because the intervening period has not been studied by these authors, we remain unsure whether such discourses have remained relatively similar through the centuries (in which case a strong case could be made that they might have caused or contributed in some way to the formation of present circumstances) or whether they have waxed/waned/disappeared entirely in the intervening centuries (in which case their explicative value might be much weaker, as this pattern would imply such discourses might themselves be precipitated or caused by changes in deeper, underlying factors). Yet, despite this paucity of long-term historical research, there are strong grounds for assuming the likelihood of continuity as an historical phenomenon.

On a very basic level, it can be argued that the fact that the actions of individuals in the past (as evidenced by historical primary sources) are comprehensible to us implies a continuity or congruence of what might be termed the 'human experience'. While specific actions and decisions taken by actors in the past may seem very alien to us, their underpinning motivations and patterns of thought seem accessible to our understanding given enough surviving evidence. As Buckle noted as far back as 1857,

there must always be a connection between the way in which men contemplate the past, and the way in which they contemplate the present; both views being in fact different forms of the same habits of thought, and therefore presenting in each age, a certain sympathy and correspondence with each other (266).

If we accept that historical and contemporary actors essentially make their choices and decide upon their actions in mutually comprehensible ways, then the possibility of historical continuity logically emerges. Philosophers have long thought that there are grounds for confidence in statements about the past. Broad, for example, argued that past events do not, logically, cease to exist and that, therefore, 'there is no *a priori* reason why they should not from time to time' 'bridge a temporal gap' and 'enter into a [...] relation with certain present events (1925: 252). Ayer argued forcefully that 'there is no such thing as a class of statements about the past' ((1952: xix), believing that knowledge about the past was as veridical as statements made about the present. Within the field of historical theory, too, there are also firm arguments in favour of historical continuity/persistence.

Koselleck's influential consideration of the concept of historical time introduced the notion of the 'contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous' (2004: 90). He argued that 'shifting between synchronic and diachronic analysis can help disclose the persistence of past experience' (89) and that historical progression only ever comes into view due to the co-existence of historical phenomena or concepts perceived (by contemporary observers) to be 'before' (ie: in advance of) or 'after' (ie: later than) their 'allotted' or 'expected' chronological times. For him, therefore, historical time was characterised by 'a dynamic of a coexisting plurality of times' (269). More recently, Corfield (2007) has offered an extended reflection on the relationship between time and history. She has conceptualised historical time as a 'trialectical' (her term) braid – composed of continuity, micro/incremental change and turning points of radical change/discontinuity. It is at the interface of these three differing forces that historical events play out. Corfield's work will be discussed further below but the point of interest here is her strong contention that 'persistence or continuity in history is an underrated and often overlooked factor' (26).

Hence, Koselleck and Corfield, in different ways, argue for the notion that events, ideas, processes and discourses persist through historical time, helping to shape the range of possibility inherent in subsequent decades and, eventually, the present. If this possibility is accepted, what does this mean for the project of historical criminology? Taking again the example of policing in London since 1750, there are aspects of this which on first glance seem to evidence considerable historical continuity and hence perhaps greater utility for

historical sources in contemporary discussions. Take, for example, the issue of police occupational culture.

Working backwards, Loftus (2010) sought to analyse changes in police culture since the foundational studies of police occupational culture conducted in the 1970s and 1980s (Reiner 1978; Holdaway 1983). Such studies had delineated a set of 'core characteristics' of police culture (including an exaggerated sense of mission, a celebration of masculine exploits, willingness to use force and engage in informal working practices, conservatism in politics and morality). Loftus' working assumption was that the significant changes in policing practices between 1970 and 2010 (including the broad shift towards community policing) would have had commensurate effects on police culture. She concluded that this was not, in fact the case, that 'there unequivocally remains a range of dispositions and practices that mirror a history of earlier research' and that 'the renowned features remain virtually untouched by initiatives aimed at changing everyday assumptions and behaviours' (17).

Looking further back, Lawrence (2010) considered police occupational culture in the early part of the twentieth century, between c.1920 and c.1960, a period often perceived by both the public and the police to have been a 'Golden Age' of English policing. He concluded that some of the core constituents of 'cop culture' such as the perception that the use of violence was an integral and exciting part of police work, and the strong belief in an us/them dichotomy separating the police and the public, displayed 'significant continuities' with the contemporary characteristics studied by Loftus and others. Ranging yet further back to the nineteenth century, Williams (2014) in a long-term study of the ways in which the police in Britain were organised and controlled has concluded that there were significant similarities in the nature of the policing function right back to the later eighteenth century, similarities which would have acted to produce and sustain a comparable police culture. As he notes,

for a Metropolitan police officer in an area car in the later 1930s, their experience of the job of policing could have been remarkably similar to their modern counterparts. For some detectives, right up to the [...] 1980s [...] the job may have

felt very similar to the tasks carried out by men from the London police offices in the late eighteenth century.

[Insert Figure 3: The Historical Persistence of Police Occupational Culture]

This is clearly just the briefest of sketches but these works do hint at an area of historical criminology where historical persistence might be identified. Further work would be necessary but it is suggestive of a view of the explanatory power of historical sources pertaining to police culture among the rank and file more similar, conceptually, to that in Figure 3 above (considerable persistence, with significant change only when voyaging back beyond the 1790s) than to that in either Figure 1 or Figure 2. Historical continuity is currently under-researched in historical criminology and long-time frame historical research may be a means by which continuities in elements of the policing function can be identified for further study, and via which historical sources suitable for inclusion in explanations of the present and proposals for the future can be identified.

The potential identification of historical continuity is not the only benefit of long time frame historical criminology, however. Equally significant are the insights it gives into the nature of change over time, and the relationship of this change to present conditions. Corfield (2007) is again a useful point of reference here, and in particular her call for a 'three-dimensional history', in which the three elements of continuity/persistence; micro/incremental and macro/radical change 'combine and intertwine continuously, though not necessarily evenly, within time-space'. Logically, it is only via a sharper look at the extent and nature of different types of change (and the light friction between them) over the *longue durée* that those of particular relevance for historical criminology can be identified. As Guldi and Armitage argue, 'the world around us is clearly one of change, irreducible to models', and hence what historical criminology pursued over the long term can offer is a way of 'thinking about the past in order to see the future' (2014: 4).

Seeking again to conceptualise and visualise this approach using our exemplar of policing in London, we might first consider the organisations and institutions of policing in London and how they changed over time. Positing the organisation of policing in London as being

subject to considerable persistence, a significant level of gradual micro-change and only occasional periods of discontinuity or radical change, and assigning putative orders of magnitude to different instances of change, it might possible to begin to imagine a conceptual map of the utility of historical data about policing in London in the present as in Figure 4 below.

[Insert Figure 4: Micro/Macro Changes in Policing in London since 1715]

Figure 4 thus represents change over time in the institutions of policing in London. Some changes (the introduction of the Metropolitan Police in 1829, for example, and the introduction of Unit Beat Policing in the 1960s) have been assigned more significance than others, meaning that their impact on the nature of policing is greater than others. These assignments of significance would, of course, by no means be accepted by all historical criminologists. However, the point being developed here is not that this is necessarily an accurate conceptual map of changes in policing in London, but rather that this form of long-time frame analysis provides an effective way to debate and analyse the development of contemporary policing.

Of course, the nature of police institutions is not the only factor determining the operation of policing in London. Other factors are at play also. One obvious example might be the numbers of police officers (or rather, the police/public ratio). Such considerations or data could also be added into the conceptual map as in Figure 5 below. Equally, any conceptual map of changes in policing over time would also need to consider the legal framework within which the police operate, which defines the extent of their formal powers. Some data points of key pieces of legislation have been added in to the visualisation in Figure 6. Many other data sets would be relevant and could be visualised or conceptualised in this way. Again, it must be stressed - the point being made here is not that this approach explains or even adequately represents the long-term development of policing in London, but rather that it may be a useful methodological tool via which to begin a consideration of change over time in relation to the objects of historical criminology.

[Insert Figure 5: Changes in Policing in London since 1715 considered alongside the Police/Public Ratio (per 1000 of population)]

[Insert Figure 6: Micro/Macro Changes in Policing in London since 1715, considered alongside the Police/Public Ratio (per 1000 of population) and Acts of Parliament modifying police powers]

One advantage of such a model, if eventually developed, is that it would enable historical criminologists to discern with more certainty the existence (or non-existence) of patches of particular turbulence and change within the criminal justice sphere. The sample mapping undertaken above, for example, would seem to indicate that from the 1960s to the present, change pertaining to policing in London has been relatively gradual and at a low level, indicating continuities which would inspire confidence in the use of historical data from that period alongside contemporary data. The mapping might also seem indicative of two periods – 1820-1840 and 1960-1980 (highlighted in grey on Figure 6) where more significant changes seem to have clustered. One possible implication of this is that, while policing prior to the 1960s was somewhat dissimilar to the contemporary (hence placing historical data in Band 2 rather than Band 1, according to the descriptors delineated on p. 5 above), the institutions and practices of policing between c.1840 and c.1960 displayed a greater degree of persistence and familiarity than has sometimes been assumed by criminologists, and hence can be bought (cautiously) into explanations of the present with a greater degree of confidence than hitherto imagined.

Any conceptual sketch at this level of abstraction is obviously a very significant oversimplification. Historical criminology must avoid a teleological sense of a straight line of development from the past to present, aiming always ‘to trace the struggles, displacements and processes of repurposing out of which contemporary practices emerged, and to show the historical conditions of existence upon which present-day practices depend’ (Garland 2014: 373). However, it is contended that a greater awareness of (and debate over) the nature and extent of change over long periods of time would be of considerable benefit to the criminological project. Logically, only long time-frame analysis can enable the significance (in relation to the present) of different types of persistence and change to be

weighed and debated in a more systematic manner than hitherto within historical criminology.

There is, however, a third advantage to long time-frame historical criminology. It may enable the identification of *resurgences* or *recurrences* of very similar historical conditions, patterns, processes and mentalities. This approach thus offers another way of interrogating and understanding the present which can sit alongside analyses of historical persistence and change over time. Rather than see historical change as unidirectional, with the passing of time gradually and cumulatively making the conditions of existence and human responses to them more and more like the present, and less and less like the past, it is perhaps more accurate (on occasion) to identify flows and eddies in the nature of historical time. The past does not, of course, repeat itself and hence seeming patterns of similarity represent not so much an historical repetition but rather 'a repressed revenant'. As Haroontunian (2007: 476) notes, consideration of historical recurrence discloses

a configuration Edmund Husserl once thought of as a 'thickened' present, a present filled with traces of different moments and temporalities, weighted with sediments. He referred to the 'comet's tail' of retentions that manage to maintain their identity long after the inaugurating event has passed.

What is being proposed here is emphatically not the search for 'cycles' in history, still less the idea that one may draw 'lessons' from the past. While the notion of historical recurrence has a long pedigree in Western thought (Trompf, 1979), historical conditions are inherently too complex and subject to chance - described by Koselleck (2004: 115) as 'a pure category of the present' - to repeat fully. However, while sets of historical conditions may not repeat or recur in their entirety, approximate versions may linger or reappear. Moreover, it is contended here that particular ideas, perceptions and representations are actually quite likely to resurface from time to time when specific and comparable confluences of historical circumstances occur to draw them forth. Of course, even these cultural traces are never entirely identical to their historical predecessors. As Bourdieu notes of cultural production more generally (1993:60)

returns to past styles are never “the same thing” since they are separated from what they return to by a negative reference to something which was itself the negation of it (or the negation of the negation).

However, historical criminology might benefit from paying more attention to the notion of historical recurrence than it has before. While, as outlined above, historical criminologists have, on occasion, sought to draw parallels between discrete periods of the past and the present (Zedner 2006), what is proposed here differs from this in its focus on a period of centuries as the frame of analysis. By searching, over a period of centuries, for instances where particular sets of circumstances, ideas, perceptions and responses appear to recur, historical criminology may be able, over time, to gain an enhanced understanding of the meta-processes by which criminological tropes or themes occur and recombine. Rather than ‘choose between *either* continuity *or* change in historical interpretation’, it may therefore be possible to ‘accommodate diverse movements in historical time’ (Churchill, Crawford & Barker 2017: 3).

Looking again to visualise such an approach with a relevant example, the classic statement of historical recurrence is still Pearson (1983). This work was concerned with the repeated resurgence of a form of cultural pessimism which perceived youth crime as a novel and threatening departure from previous (presumed) periods of stability and deference. Pearson identified a recurring tendency to decry the rowdy and riotous behaviour of young people by juxtaposing it with a putative ‘Golden Age’ founded upon ‘civility, reasonableness and an unquestioning respect for law and authority’ (1). This golden age, Pearson contended, was invariably identified about 20 years prior to the temporal standpoint of the author complaining about youthful behaviours. Pearson’s findings might be visualised, using the framework developed above, as in Figure 7 below.

[Insert Figure 7: Historical Recurrence of Representations/Fears of Juvenile Delinquency]

Arguably, Pearson in fact sought to identify a continuity of sorts – in a particular perceptions of juvenile behaviour and crime – but in doing so identified a recursive trope in public discourse, more apparent at certain moments than at others. As Figure 7 shows, there were

repeated, very similar concerns expressed about juvenile behaviours (which led in turn in most instances to defined policy interventions) in the years immediately before/after 1981 (the Brixton Riots), 1958 (the Notting Hill Riots), 1925 (the Racecourse Riots), 1898 (concerns over the 'new' phenomenon of 'hooliganism') and so forth back to the start of the nineteenth century and beyond. This long time-frame analysis thus suggests both the recurrence and significance of a particular discursive trope or meme but also, logically, that historical primary sources pertaining to public discourse about youth crime may wax and wane in how useful they are in relation to the explanation of a given present.

Pearson is virtually the sole exponent of this type of analysis. Although there are one or two others (see, for example, Yeomans, 2014; Roth, 2012) it remains rare within criminology, but the advantages of its wider adoption could be considerable. In addition, it might be argued that the concept of historical resurgence does not necessarily have to identify multiple resurgences to be methodologically useful. Long time-frame analysis may also simply enable the identification of single events or periods in the past which appear to have a particularly resonant affinity with a given present. This might be an *affective* connection, 'characterized by [...] the collapsing of temporalities and an emphasis on [...] individual experience and daily life rather than historical events, structures and processes' (Agnew, 2007: 299). Alternatively, it might be a particular confluence of historical circumstances which appear of such similarity to the present that they may have policy implications. Overall, the point being made here is that the third advantage of long time-frame historical analysis is that shifts us away from and beyond a strictly linear view of historical time (as constituted by the tension between continuity and change), towards a more complex and open formulation which admits to the possibility of flows and eddies within and between different, co-existing planes of historical time.

Conclusion

If historical criminology is to find greater traction within the field of mainstream criminology, it would be advantageous to have a defensible and well-defined sense of its claim to utility. Current modes of historical criminology predominantly deploy historical data as a foil or adjunct to criminological thought in the present – using historical data to

stimulate ideas and to challenge the *status quo* rather than as potentially explicative of the present in its own right. While these current modes of historical criminology have proved methodologically valuable in their own right, this article has argued that historical criminology should seek now to adopt a 'long time frame approach' to the study of the past, looking to gather data over periods of several centuries. It has contended that this potentially offers three advantages to contemporary criminology: the identification and analysis of historical continuities (an under-researched and under-theorised topic); a more nuanced, shared understanding of micro/macro change over time in relation to criminal justice; and a method for identifying and analysing instances of historical recurrence, particularly in ideas, perceptions and discourses around crime and justice.

The adoption of such an approach, and particularly the *blending* of all three types of analysis, would endow criminologists with a clearer and richer view of the contemporary criminological landscape. This approach is not likely to be achievable via the work of individual scholars. The scale of the undertaking is such that it is likely that historical criminologists will need to work in teams to develop such a model. Calls have already been made for such collaboration (Corfield 2010; Lawrence 2012;) and it is possible to envisage scholars working on individual research projects but also contributing their findings to much broader collaborative teams eventually able to intervene more decisively in contemporary debates. Such an approach would fit well with the desire for relevant influence currently evident in the fields of both criminology and history, and would contribute to the development of Guldi and Armitage's concept of a 'public future' by providing 'scholars trained in looking at the past, who can explain where things came from [...] and who are dedicated to serve the public through responsible thinking about the nexus of past, present, and future' (2014: 118). Overall, as Corfield notes, perhaps 'it is now time to return to thinking long as well as deep' (2010: 8).

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Historical Criminology and the Explanatory Power of the Present Supporting Figures

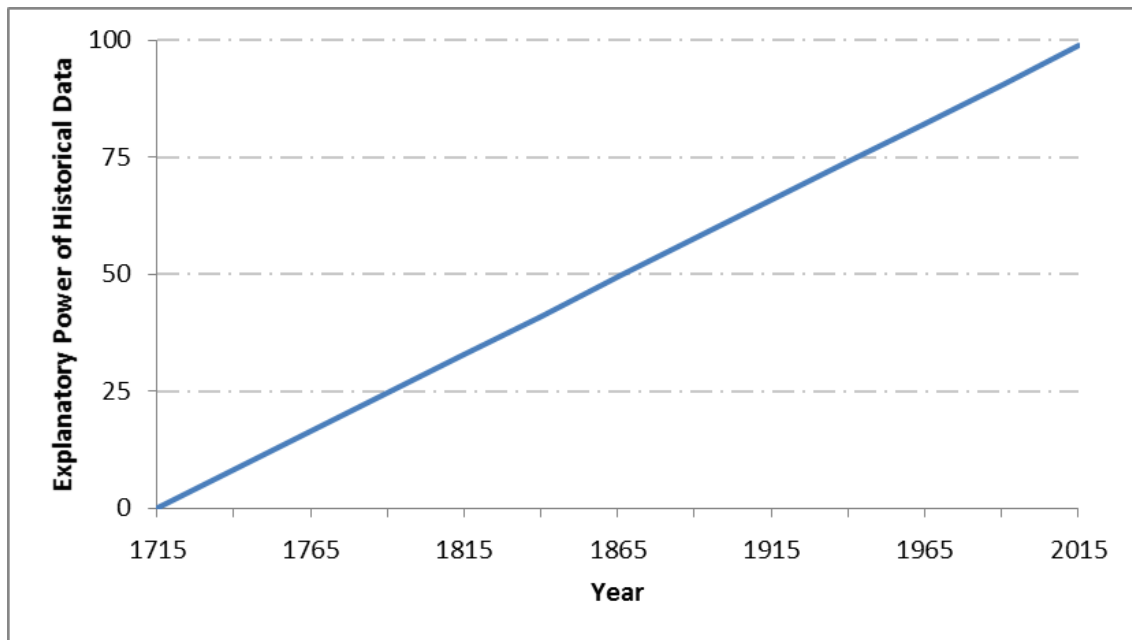


Figure 1: The 'Common-Sense' View of the Contemporary Utility of Historical Data about Policing

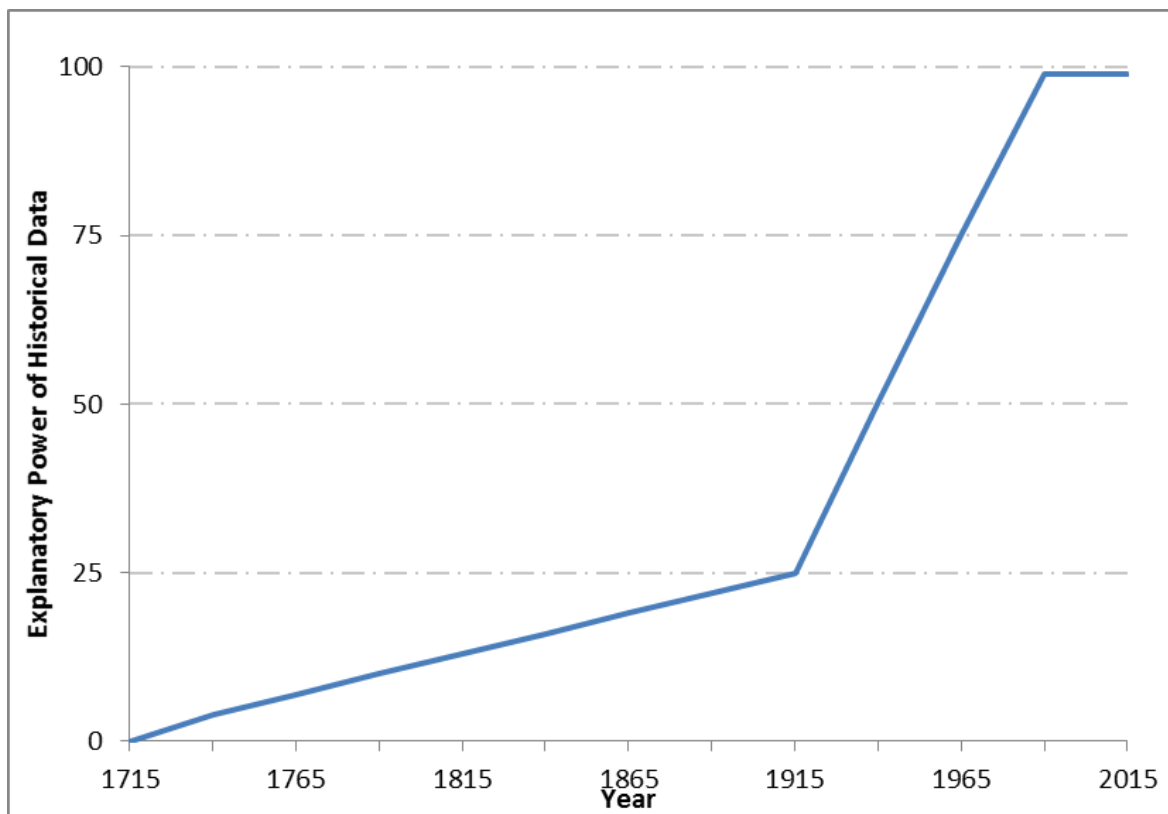


Figure 2: The Prevalent Criminological Conception of the Explanatory Power of Historical Data

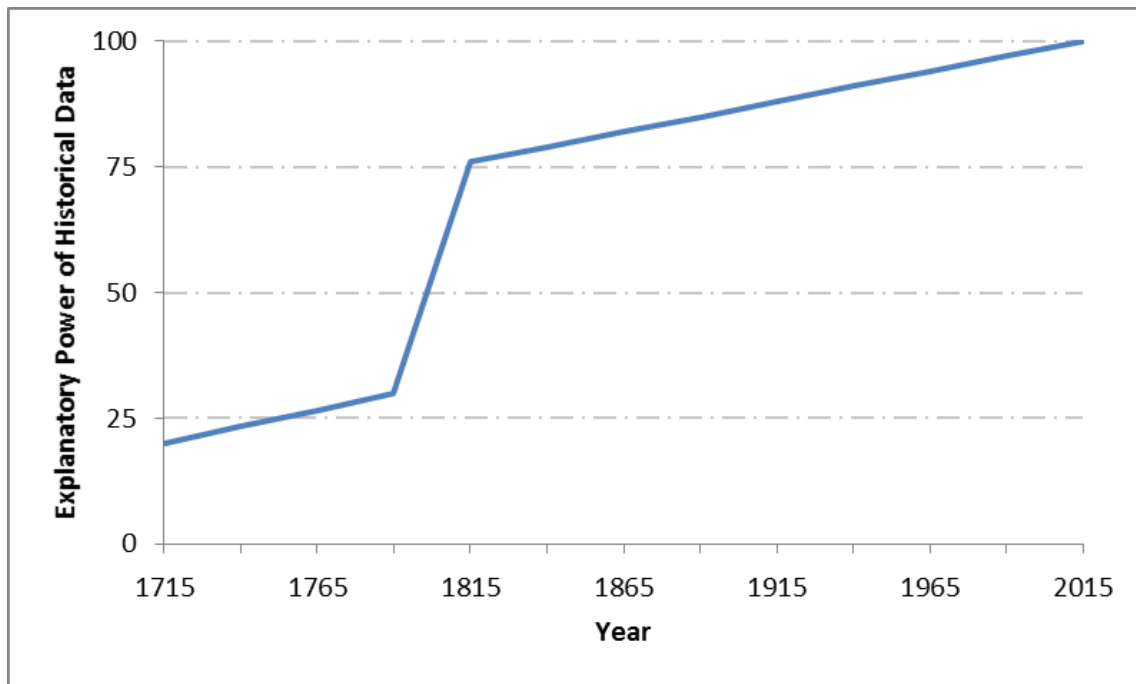


Figure 3: The Historical Persistence of Police Occupational Culture

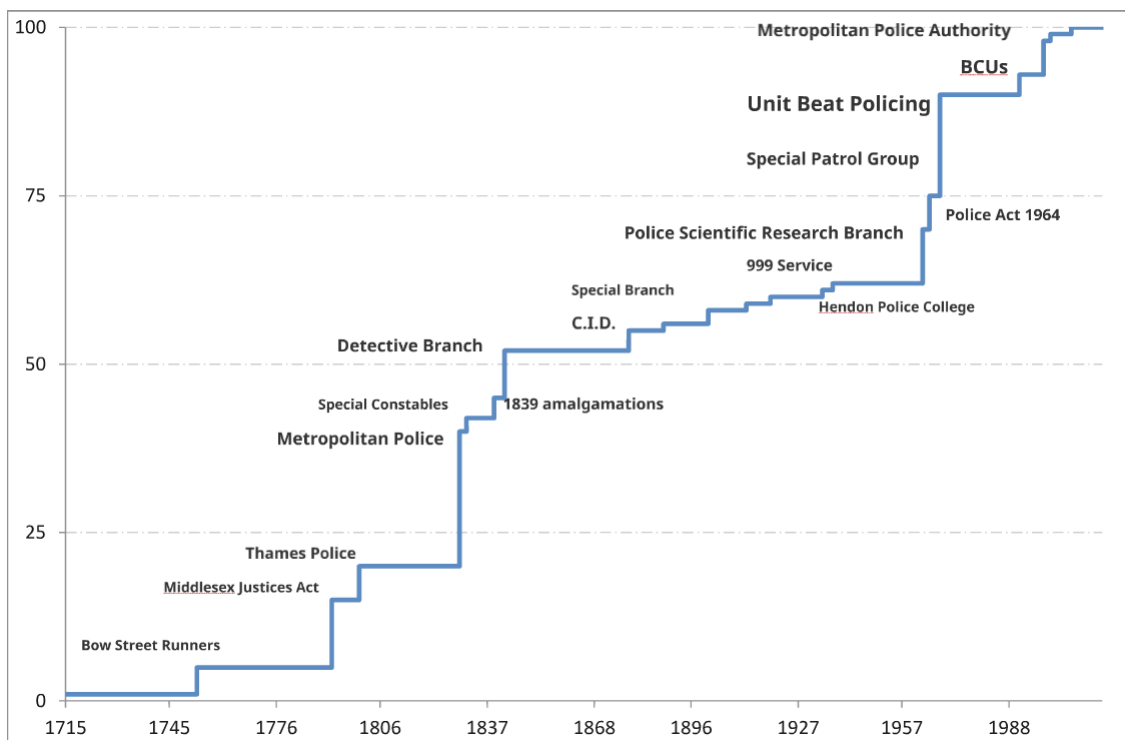


Figure 4: Micro/Macro Changes in Policing in London since 1715

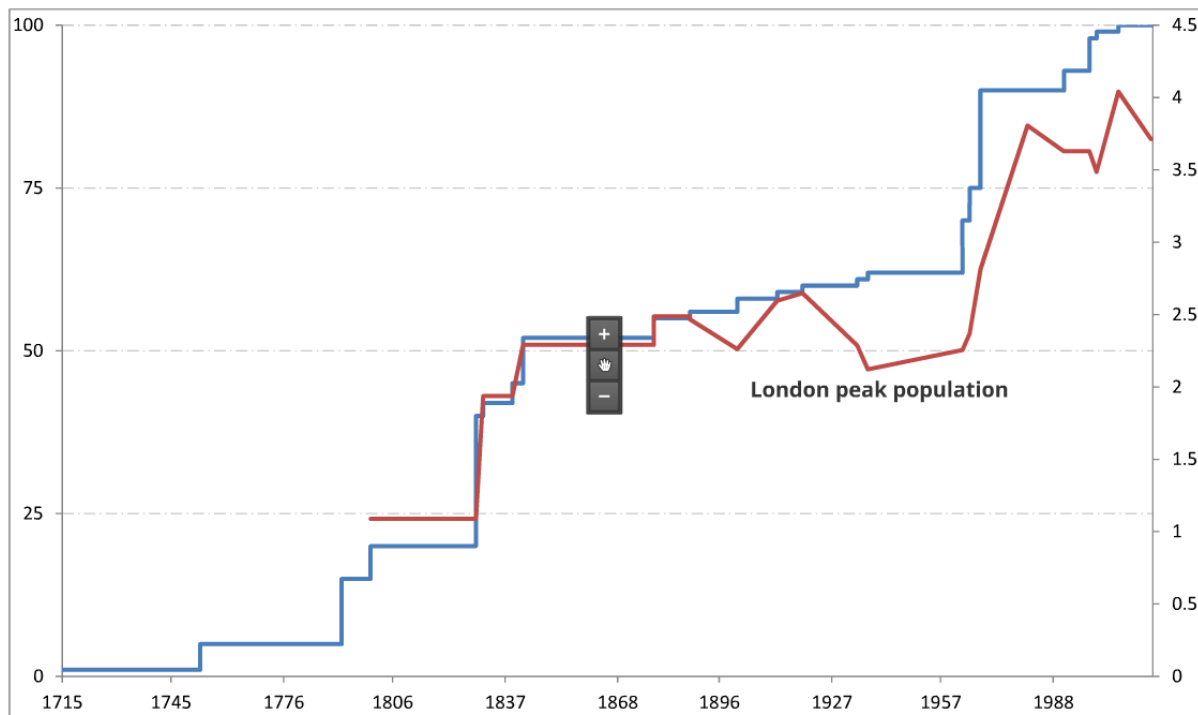


Figure 5: Micro/Macro Changes in Policing in London since 1715, considered alongside the Police/Public Ratio (per 1000 of population) and Major Acts of Parliament. Note: The year 1931 was a peak in the population of London, only exceeded in 2015.

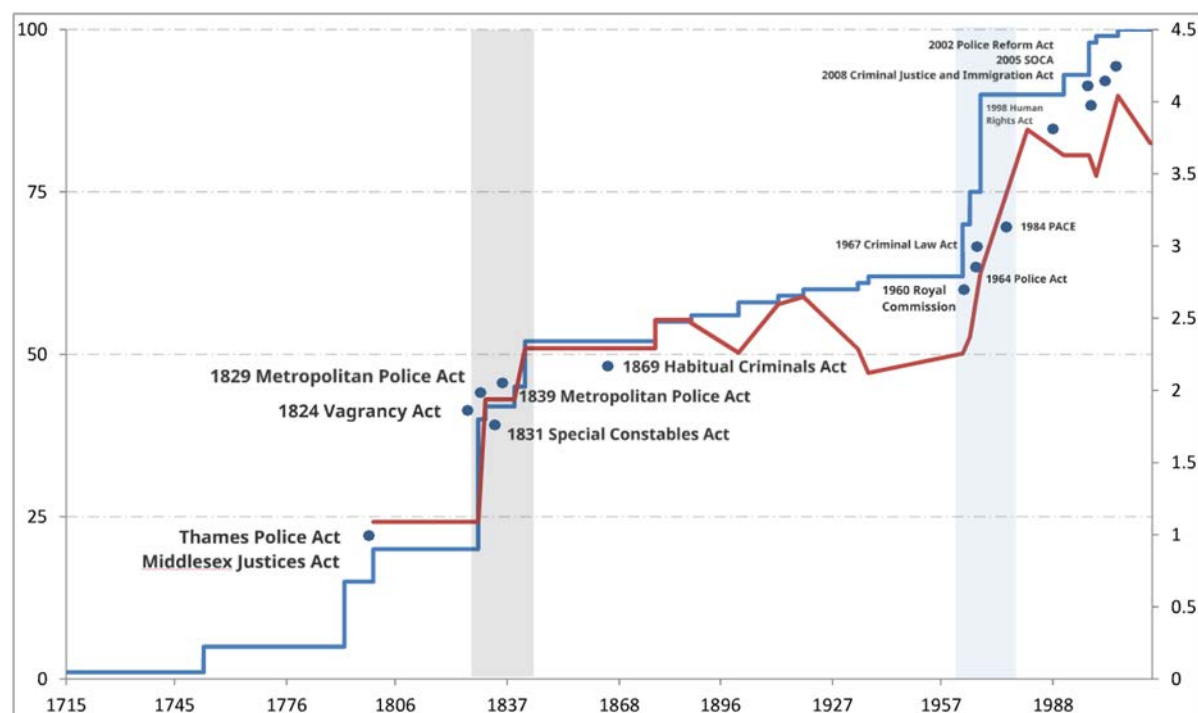


Figure 6: Micro-Macro Changes in Policing in London since 1715, considered alongside the Police/Public Ratio (per 1000 of population) and Acts of Parliament modifying police powers

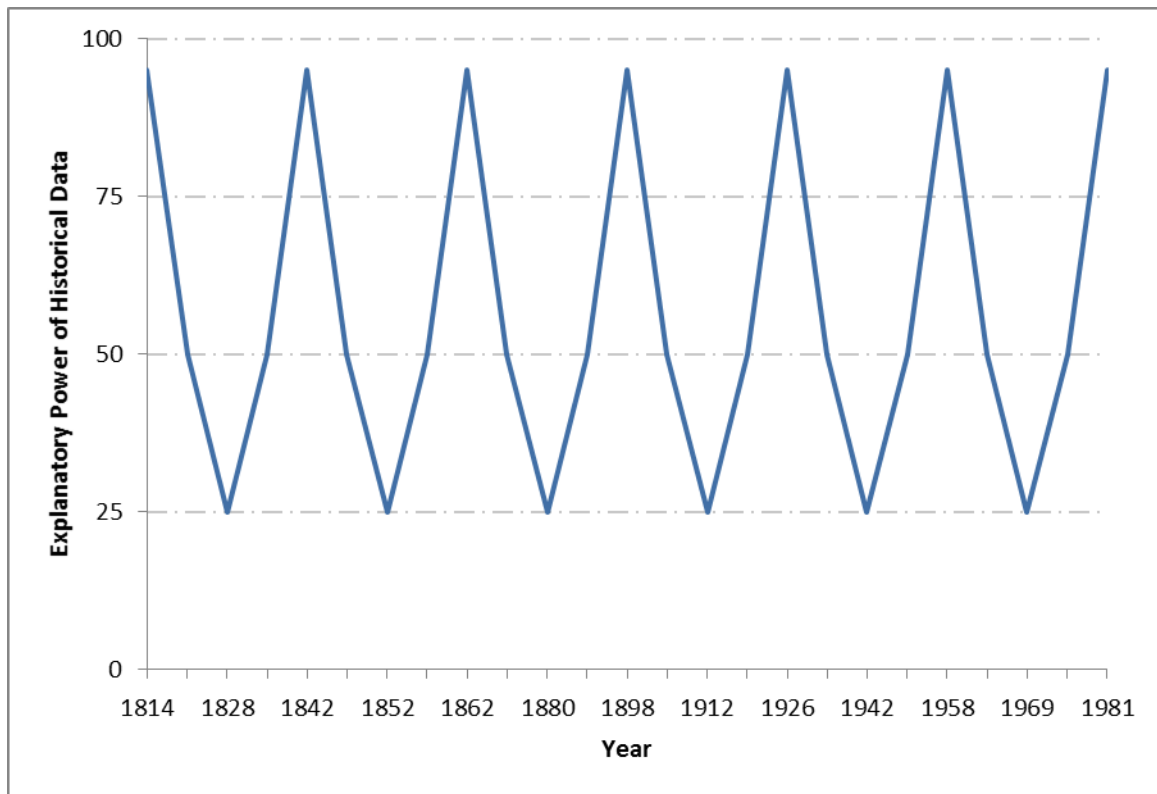


Figure 7: Historical Recurrence of Representations/Fears of Juvenile Delinquency